DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 022 394 FL 000 946

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THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY.

Illinois State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Springfield.
Pub Date Mar 68
Note-13p.
Journal Cit-Illinois Journal of Education; v59 n3 p3-15 Mar 1968
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60
Descriptors-*AUDIO ACTIVE COMPARE LABORATORIES, AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, COLLEGE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, LANGUAGE LABORATORY EQUIPMENT, *LANGUAGE LABORATORY USE, LANGUAGE TEACHERS, *ORIENTATION MATERIALS, SECONDARY SCHOOLS

An appraisal of the language laboratory attempts to clarify its purpose and its proper use. The first part of the article describes the various advantages of laboratory instruction, stressing the value of individual study and progress and the need for a "live" teacher. Types of equipment in a "Dialog" laboratory are explained and illustrated in the second part. The final section suggests effective use of the electronic materials through attitude and utilization of mechanical facilities. (DS)

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THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY

From: Illinois Journal of Education, Vol. 59, No.3, March 1968.

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As you begin using the language laboratory, you may well have some questions about its purpose or, as the French might say, its "raison d'etre," which, loosely translated, suggests, "Why have one?"

It is good if you have questions, and in the following material most of your questions will probably be answered.

The first question is very basic:

WHAT IS A *LANGUAGE LABORATORY,* OR, AS WE USUALLY CALL IT, LANGUAGE *LAB?*

As the word "labor" (from Latin) indicates, the *labor*atory is a *workroom.* In a strict sense, it is not a laboratory since it has little to do with experiments, so commonly associated with a *laboratory.*

KEEP IN MIND AT ALL TIMES: The language laboratory is a *workroom,* outfitted with the most modern equipment for efficient practice and learning of a modern foreign language.

The second question follows quite naturally:

IS THE *LANGUAGE LAB* REALLY WORTHWHILE?

The answer to this question is one that you really must give yourself. Here are a few items you may want to consider:

a. Since World War II, the Army Language School, Monterey, California, has been using a language laboratory extensively. Results are unquestioned. This school ranks as one of the best modern language schools in the world.
b. Since the early 1930's, Middlebury College, Vermont, with its renowned modern language program, has been using a type of language laboratory. It has continued to expand and refine the laboratory's equipment ever since.
c. Virtually every high school in the Chicago Area has a language laboratory or has definite plans for installing one. Over twenty suburban schools have the "dial-type" lab, which we are using.
d. The University of Illinois recently made arrangements with the telephone company whereby a student can dial a given number on a standard telephone and get a specific language practice program—at home, at school—almost anywhere, including a lonely telephone booth along the road.

Since so many are using the lab, and its use is spreading, we might assume that the language lab is really worthwhile, just as we do in the case of cars, a means of getting somewhere that almost everyone finds really worthwhile. But, as in the case of the car, if the user goes to sleep while "driving," the laboratory may not always get the user to his destination. Like the car, the lab can be a disaster.

Learn to use the lab properly and attentively. It can do wonders, if you give it a chance.

A practical question:

WHAT ARE SOME SPECIFIC ADVANTAGES OF THE LAB?

The answer to this will be much clearer when we come to the section *HOW BEST TO USE THE LANGUAGE LAB.* For now, there are these distinct advantages to keep in mind:

a. The booth and headset give you a chance to hear perfect pronunciation and accent, without distraction.
b. The booth and headset make it possible to imitate, to "parrot," to hear yourself as you do it, all without bothering anyone else—or being bothered.
c. In "lab-study" sessions you can work at your own speed. If you need review on a lesson, it is there for you. If you work ahead of the class, you can dial into your new program when you wish.
d. During class sessions the teacher can:
   1. Listen to your responses.
   2. Help in improving your responsees.
   3. Answer any questions you may have—all without disturbing anyone around you.

A rather sensitive question:

IS THE LANGUAGE LAB A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE TEACHER?

Some language courses are actually programmed (e.g. Encyclopedia Britannica) so that the student is supposed to be able to learn the language by himself, while using the "programmed" tapes and other mechanical aids.

The results have proven to be quite good. However, we know that a part of language communication consists in having a live person to *talk to* and to *react to.* There are *mannerisms, facial expression,* and *inflections* to be taken into account.

Be thankful that you have the assistance of a "live" teacher; except for the unusual student, this is a necessity.

Someone might think of asking:

DOESN'T A LONG SESSION OF JUST LISTENING AND REPEATING IN A BOOTH GET PRETTY BORING?

It can! Anything that requires repetition for mastery can get boring. However, there are ways to avoid most of it.

a. Keep in mind the goal of perfection in each exercise you do.
b. When working on your own, in "lab-study," break after about ten minutes of concentration. (Most programs in our lab are set up for about that

length of time.) Take the headset off for a minute or two, then dial your program again.

And, finally:

AREN'T THE HEADSETS UNCOMFORTABLE?

In a way, they are, but so are shoes, if you prefer going barefoot.

Proper adjustment (refer to: *HOW TO BEST USE THE LANGUAGE LAB*) will eliminate most problems of discomfort, but not *all* for *everyone.* Actually, one of the most important features of the language lab is the individual headset. Use it properly, accustom yourself to it, and be glad one is provided for you.

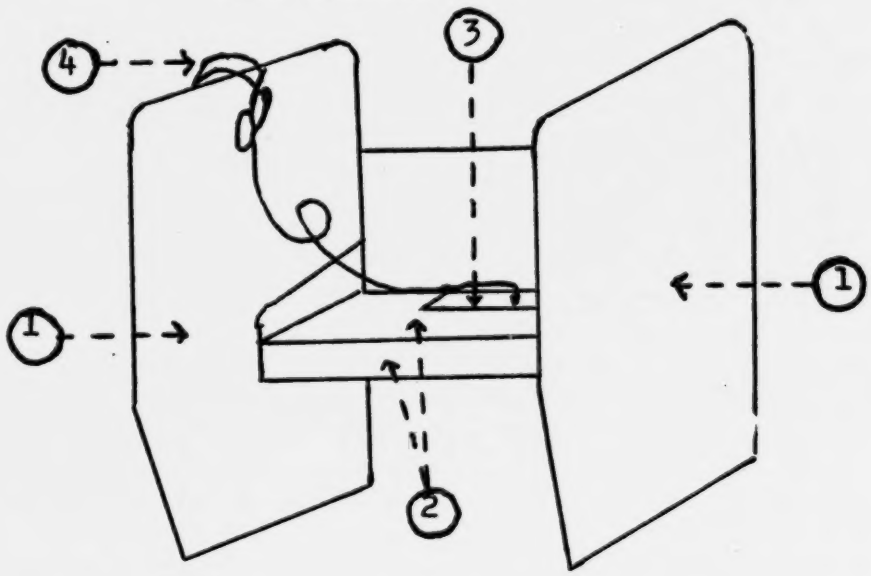
PART 2 — EQUIPMENT

In the language lab, as well as in the language lab office, are the many and varied types of equipment that make up a "Dialog" lab. You should be aware of these and have at least an elementary understanding of their functions. Compare the items and descriptions with the sketches below.

BOOTHS—1. side panels (low front panel)—for less distraction, more privacy in learning

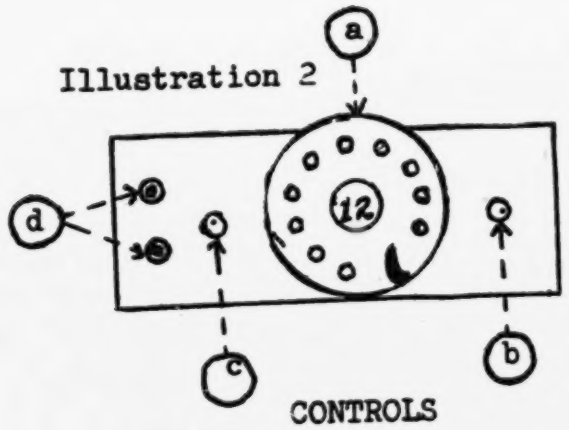
2. work area (desk)—for writing and taking notes—shelf—everyone has extra books, and papers

Illustration 1



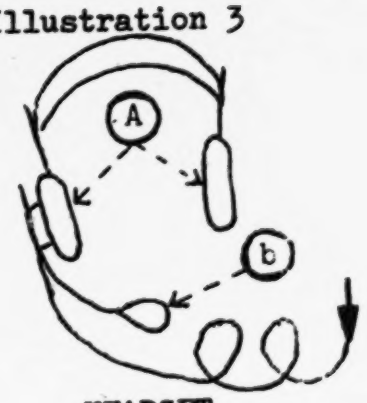
3. controls—the metal plate at the front of the desk-work area
   a. dial—for selecting your program
   b. volume—increase or decrease to fit your needs
   c. microphone—for certain types of work, it's best in *off* position.
   d. plugs (jacks)—the headset is plugged in here; the extra one is for the teacher or a visitor—to check functioning of your booth.
4. headset
   a. earpieces—removable plastic covers
   b. microphone—adjustable; fine fidelity

Illustration 2



CONTROLS

Illustration 3



HEADSET

TEACHER'S CONSOLE

1. dial—When an entire class uses the same program, the teacher may dial for everyone from the console. Forty-eight programs from which to choose)
2. channel controls—When the program originates from the console, the teacher can select any four out of nine possible programs and channel them to four separate groups of students at one time.

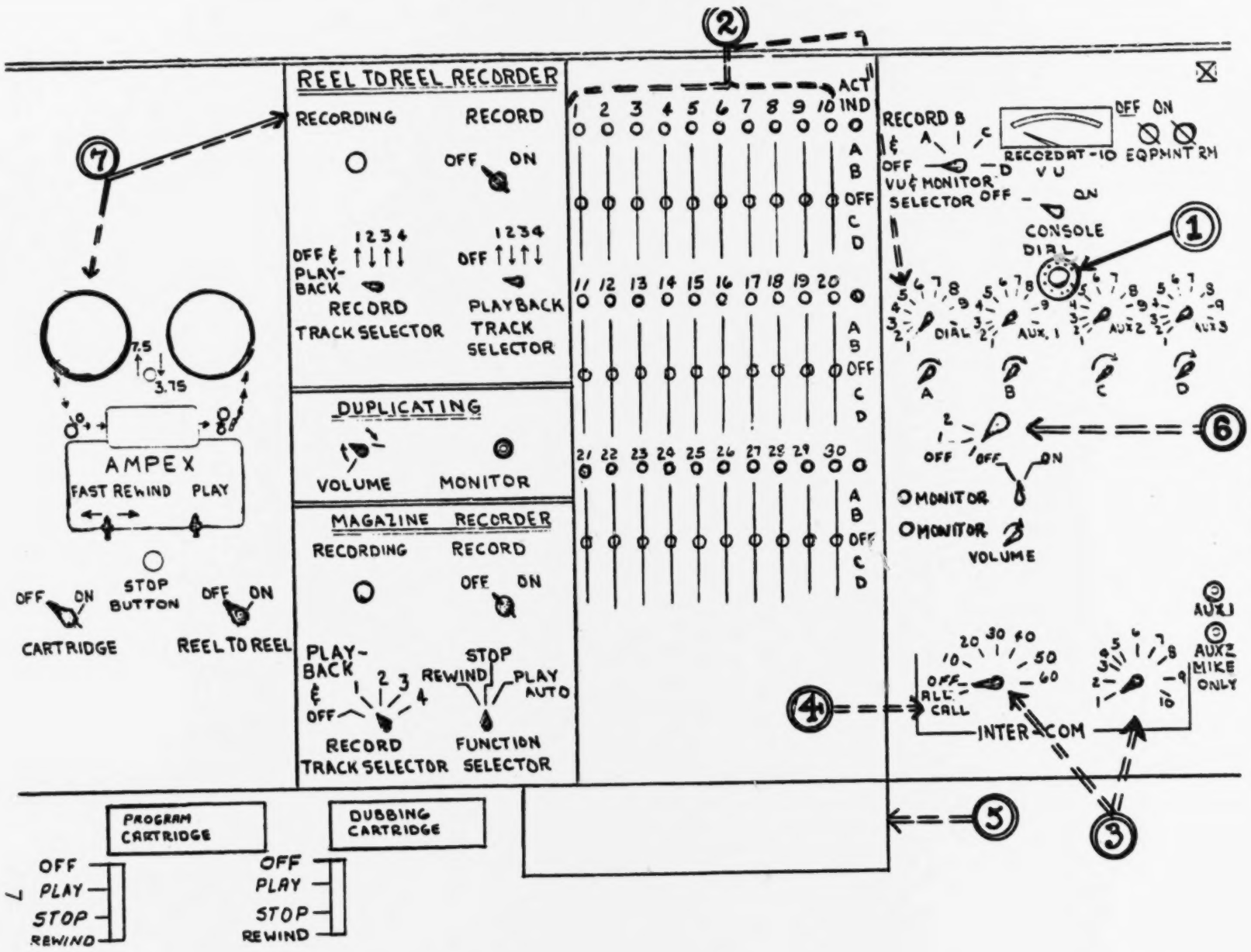


Illustration 4

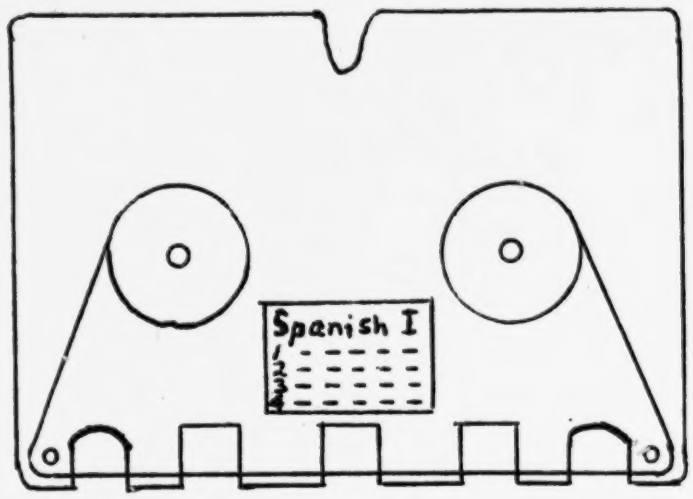
3. direct communication—This is to make possible the teacher's listening to individual students. Then the teacher can make corrections or offer suggestions for improvement—or answer questions.
4. all-call—Using this, the teacher can give instructions to the entire class.
5. phonograph
6. loud speaker—Located above the window at the front of the lab, it is controlled from the console.
7. dubbing—All foreign language programs that are available for dialing must be put on *tape cartridges.* (Illustration 5) This is called *dubbing.* The extensive area of the console used for doing this is indicated on the diagram below.

So that you can have a very general idea of the make-up of the teacher's console, an extremely simplified diagram is given below. The console is sensitive and complicated; it has to do a great many things. You will understand why we ask students not to do more than *look* at it. (If you are interested, ask your teacher for a demonstration.)

TAPE CARTRIDGES—All oral exercises, coordinated with the textbook, are dubbed onto tape cartridges. The small reels holding the recording tape are enclosed in a transparent, plastic container; rewind takes place automatically. With these, there is no need to "thread" reels. The cartridges can quickly and simply be slipped into the proper grooves and are ready to go.

Cartridges can be used either at the console or in the program source cabinets (See Illustration 7) in the lab office.

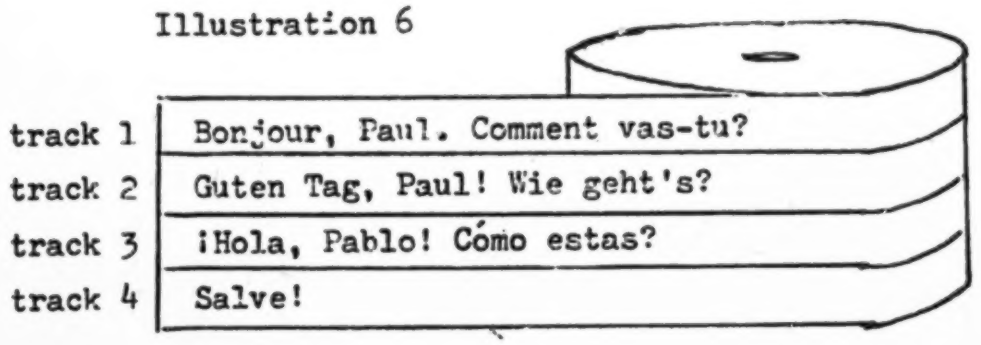
Illustration 5



Each tape on the cartridges has four tracks, so that four programs can be on each length of tape.

Enlarged, it might give this impression:

Illustration 6



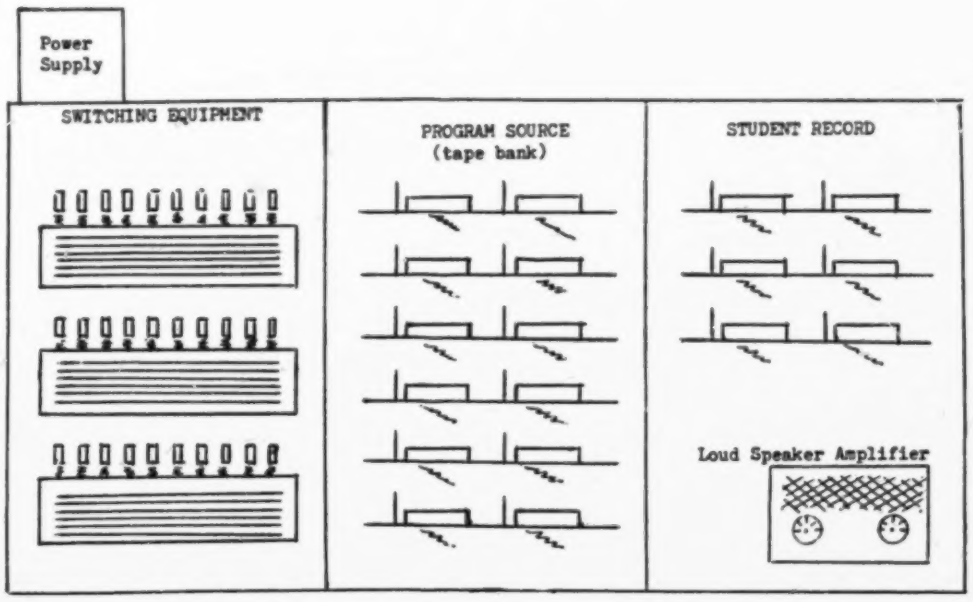
EQUIPMENT CABINETS—language lab office

This area is divided into three sections:

1. switching equipment—This is an intricate system, just like that used in standard telephone dialing. From any one of thirty booths in the lab, the student may dial any program that is in the *program source* (tape bank) at that time—completely transistorized.
2. program source (tape bank)—In this section there are twelve tape decks, all controlled by the dialing system. To start a tape, you must *dial in;* when it reaches the end it automatically rewinds at fast speed, stops, and waits until someone dials into it again.

   Special identification cards *on each cartridge, on each tape deck, at the console,* and *projected onto the screen* in the lab make it possible for students to locate the desired program quickly, and for the lab supervisor to locate any malfunctioning tape.
3. student record—After training, and for special types of exercises, you may want to make use of this section. Here it is possible to record your own voice, as the exercises are done, then rewind and replay, listening and comparing with the master voice on the tape. This is a real challenge, it takes a lot of concentration!

Illustration 7



PART 3 — HOW BEST TO USE THE LAB

There is no doubt that the language lab is complex and challenging as a learning aid for foreign language students. It has many functions; and it will work for you through all of them, speeding up the pace at which you will learn to speak and understand the foreign language, or languages, you have chosen. You will hear many native speakers— young and old, men and women—speaking rapidly, naturally, and clearly. In some ways it will be a better experience for you than visiting the country itself, where people sometimes mumble or speak a bit carelessly. (But who are we to talk, when some of us still say "goin" for "going," and "dja" for "did you?") In using the lab, we assume that you will want to do your best, both in *atiitude* and *use of mechanical facilities.* Those two areas are important for you to keep in mind; they are, of course, interrelated, but different—somewhat like "going for a ride" and "driving a car," with *you* behind the wheel in both instances.

1. HOW TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF THE LAB
   a. *LISTEN* carefully and as accurately as possible to the inflection and accent of each speaker.
   b. *MIMIC* EVERYTHING about the speaker's voice immediately. Do not look at the text for cues, just imitate every sound—the inflection, accent, emphasis, singsong, intonation, speed, rhythm—the best you can.

      DON'T be afraid to exaggerate the first few times.

      DON'T worry if you can't do it right the first time, or even the second. You have lots of company.

c. BE AWARE of what the speaker is saying and of what you are saying in response.

d. Every language has peculiar sounds that do not exist in English. (e.g. French "u"; German "oe"; Spanish "¡") Be alert to these. As you imitate the native speaker on tape, try to picture the position of mouth, tongue, lips, etc., so that you can practice reproducing the strange sounds outside the lab, from memory.

e. Speak in FULL VOICE, so that you hear yourself well (that's part of why you have a microphone) and as a result gain confidence and fluency.

2. HOW BEST TO USE LAB EQUIPMENT

Any electronic device is sensitive and must be handled with care. There are so many small, intricate parts that, when something does go wrong, it often takes a bit of patience and a lot of know-how to find the cause.
The type equipment we have is one of the best:

a. The headsets are light, adjustable, and reasonably comfortable.

b. The microphones are sensitive and reliable.

c. Sound reproduction is of high quality.

d. While booths do not completely isolate, as in a telephone booth, they do provide separation enough for freedom in individual listening and responding.

e. A great many programs are quickly available to students.

To keep things working properly, we rely on the following:

a. student lab assistants

b. monthly checkup and repair by manufacturer's representative (also emergency service)

c. student handling of equipment with intelligence and care

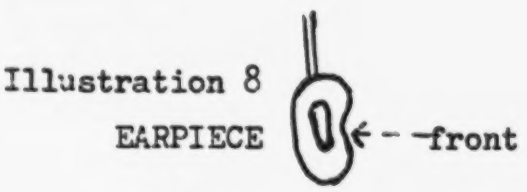
By following the suggestions, you can expect good, seldom-interrupted service.

A. HEADSET

Before putting on the headset, take a look at its construction. Compare it with the simplified diagram. (Illustration 10)

1. Note that you can tell the front from the back by the shape of the earpieces.

Illustration 8



2. The earpieces are attached to rods that slide back and forth. When you put on the headset, you can adjust it to suit your own needs.
3. Attached to the *left* earpiece is a boom microphone.

   FIRST, it is on a swivel, so that it can be turned toward the front and up to the side of the head, when not in use.

   SECOND, it slides so that it can be adjusted to a proper position and distance from your mouth.
4. There are three very small two-prong plugs, about this size and shape:

Illustration 9

They are labeled (x) in illustration 10. CHECK THESE each time before putting on the headset. If they are not properly in, your headset will either not work at all, or it will work only partially.

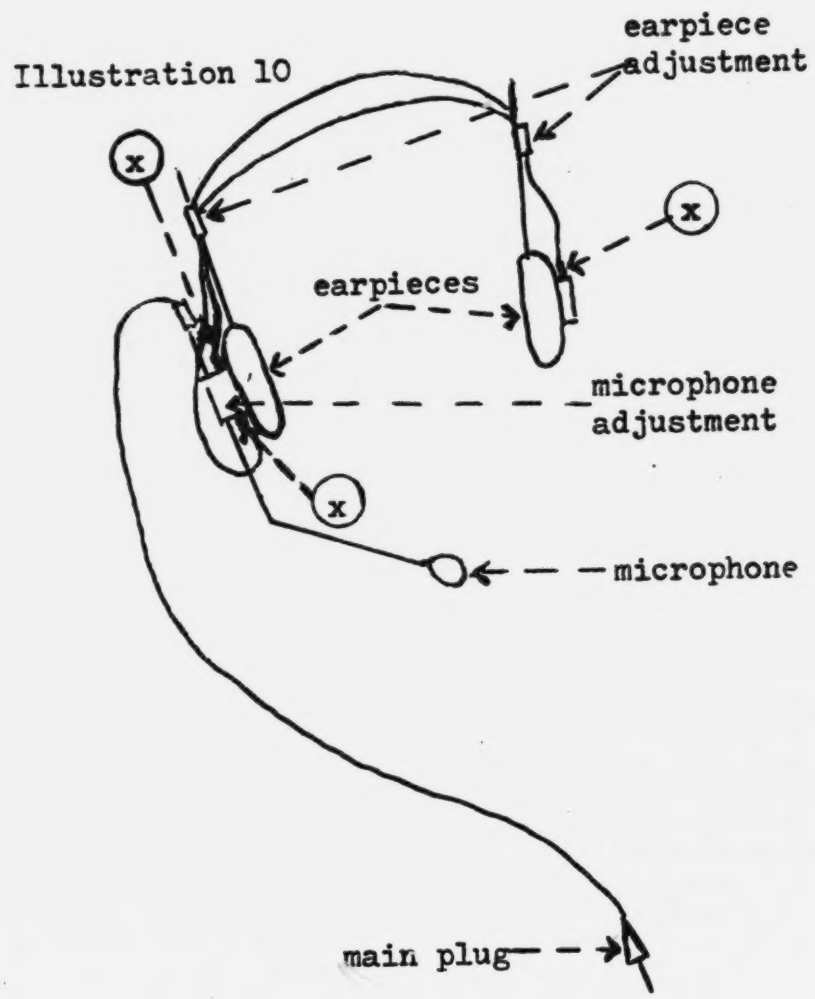
5. The *main plug* must be completely inserted in one of the two openings for that purpose at the left end of the controls plate in your booth. If you find that the plug will not go completely in, try the other opening.

   IF, during a program, the headset suddenly stops working, check to see that plugs are in fully. If it still does not work, try holding the wire where it enters the main plug; move it around gently until you may find that by holding it in a certain position, it can be made to work.

   At the end of a program, *always* report such a malfunction.

   NOTE: If this occurs during a LISTENING-COMPREHENSION TEST, report it immediately; do not try to make adjustments.
6. Note carefully where headsets are kept when not in use. *Your* headset is over the booth panel to your left, as you sit. Replace it there after use, with microphone in UP position.

Illustration 10



3. LISTENING TO PROGRAM
   a. Put on your headset; adjust earpieces and microphone.
   b. Generally, if the whole class is going to do the same work, the teacher will then check the functioning of your headsets by speaking to you on ALL-CALL.
   c. Unless there is a good reason to the contrary, turn on your microphone. (controls plate, left switch)
   d. Check the dial number of the program you want
      A. Projected on screen at right, front of room
      B. Or ask teacher or lab assistant.
         (At the bottom of screen will be information about booths or student-recorders not functioning.)

e. Dial for your program. Follow steps carefully.

1. (If you are in any one of) BOOTHS 7-30

—Dial the first number.

—Wait for dial tone, a continuous buzz. If many are dialing at once, you may have to wait 20-30 seconds before you get the dial tone.

—When you have the dial tone, dial the last two numbers immediately.

—The program should begin now. If, after 20-30 seconds, it has not begun, try dialing again by first dialing *out,* Number 1, then proceeding again as above. If still no luck, ask supervisor or lab assistant for help.

2. (If you are in any one of) BOOTHS 1-6

—Dial *6* (Do not dial the first number at all.)
(Even before you dial *6,* you should hear a continuous, light dial tone.)

—Wait for a stronger, continuous buzz. If there are many dialing at the same time you may have to wait 20-30 seconds.

—When you have the full dial tone, dial the last two numbers.

—The program should begin now. If, after 20-30 seconds, it has not begun, try dialing out, Number 1, then repeating complete dial procedure as above. If still no luck, ask supervisor or lab assistant for help.

3. STUDENT RECORD (booths 1-6 only)

Although the procedure for use of this function is given here, it remains a bit more complicated than the directions would suggest. It is recommended that you ask the lab supervisor or lab assistant to demonstrate the *student record* for you before you attempt it by yourself.

—Dial *6.*

—Wait for FULL dial tone—strong, continuous buzz.
(If many are dialing at the same time, you may have to wait 20-30 seconds.)

—When you have the FULL dial tone, dial the last two numbers.

—You should now receive the program you want and be able to record your voice in the pauses.
(BE SURE microphone is on!)

—After you are finished recording, dial *3* to stop.

—Dial *7* to rewind.

—Dial *3* to stop again.

(Rewind will stop automatically at end of tape, but you MUST DIAL *3* again in order to get playback)

—Dial *2* to begin playback.

f. Volume—You have a control button (right end of controls plate). Set it for best reception. Note that it turns all the way around. It reaches high volume, then starts over completely, at low volume.

g. Dialing *out* (cutting off program not wanted, or when leaving) *Simply dial Number 1.*

NOTE: To dial *in* again, after dialed *out,* you must follow procedure *1, 2,* or possibly *3* fully again, as above.

4. SOME THINGS TO WATCH FOR

a. When you dial a program, you may find that it begins for you at the middle, or at some other spot, rather than at the beginning. Just continue there, wait for rewind at the end, then dial for the beginning of the same program.

b. If you get a lot of static, a garbled sound, a sound "like people talking under water," or two programs at once, report it to the lab assistant or supervisor. A minor adjustment often clears this.

c. The work atmosphere must prevail at all times in the language lab, even though you must be speaking aloud in your booth, as you repeat and practice phrases. If you rarely need to speak to someone, ASK PERMISSION.

LAB-STUDY SESSIONS

Homework on oral assignments is often difficult to do outside the classroom, or "at home," since neither teachers nor tapes are readily available. For this reason, the lab is open twice each day for *lab-study* purposes: Period I and following afternoon dismissal. Students may come in and work, just as they would if they went to the library for study or research.

Be sure to bring with you a LANGUAGE LAB PRACTICE RECORD CARD, available in the lab or from your teacher. At the end of each day's session, your card will be stamped by the supervisor. Frequent attendance means extra credit!

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ILLINOIS JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

Volume 59
Number 3
Whole No. 545

The ILLINOIS JOURNAL OF EDUCATION is issued monthly except November, May, June, July, and August by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Room 302, State Office Building, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

(Printed by Authority of the State of Illinois)

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